

State Adoptions

The first hope for children and youth in state custody is to safely reunify with their parents. When that can't happen, the state must pursue other options for achieving permanence.

We first pursue adoption with people who already have a connection to a child (e.g., relatives, family friends, and the current foster parents). Sometimes, however, they are unable to adopt and new families need to be found.

The need for adoptive parents

On any given day in Vermont, there are about 60 children waiting in foster care for families to adopt them.

- Most are school-aged.
- Many have special needs related to the trauma they experienced.
- Some are part of a sibling group who want to stay together.

What they all have in common is the desire to belong. They all want a place to call home. Someone they can share good news with and ask for advice. Someone to rely on. *They all want families!*

MANY PEOPLE THINK OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS WHEN THEY THINK OF ADOPTING. TEENS ALSO HUNGER FOR FAMILY. THEY ARE STILL DEVELOPING. IT'S AN IMPORTANT TIME IN THEIR LIVES. THEY NEED THAT SENSE OF BELONGING TO SOMEONE AND A PLACE TO CALL HOME. THEY MAY ONLY BE TEENS FOR A FEW MORE YEARS, BUT THEY WILL BE YOUR CHILDREN FOR A LIFETIME.

Who can apply

To adopt a child in foster care, you:

- Must be at least 21 years old;
- Must have enough room to house a child and sufficient income to support your family; and
- Can be single, married, living with a partner, or joined through a civil union.

Applications are considered regardless of disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity/ expression, race, religion, or sexual orientation.

Who we are looking for

Adoptive parents come from all walks of life — with diverse life experiences, levels of education, income levels, occupations, and lifestyles. Some have experience with children, while others are willing to learn.

What they all have in common is:

- The desire to help a child;
- The self-assurance to ask for help when they need it;
- The ability to recognize and celebrate small successes;
- The willingness to stick by a child through difficult times;
- The capacity to learn and grow;
- An extended network of support; and
- Compassion, patience, tolerance, strength of character, and a sense of humor.

The Adoption Process

1. Call Project Family.

Project Family is a partnership between the Vermont Department for Children and Families and Lund (*the state's largest private, non-profit adoption agency*). Together, we find and support permanent families for children in foster care.

Call us at 1-800-746-7000. Someone will talk to you about your experience with children, why you're interested in adoption, the type of child you'd like to adopt, and other issues (e.g., your family's financial situation and health).

2. Register or apply.

If you *live in Vermont*, you can:

- A. Register your current, approved adoption homestudy or foster care licence with Project Family; or
- B. Apply to have an adoption homestudy completed for free. *The homestudy will remain our property and be restricted to the adoption of a child in Vermont foster care.*

If you *live out of state*, you must have an adoption homestudy completed by an agency licensed in your state and then register it with us.

3. Attend training.

You are strongly encouraged to attend adoptive parenting training offered by the Child Welfare Training Partnership. It will help prepare you for the lifelong commitment you are about to make.

ADOPTING A CHILD WILL AFFECT EVERY ASPECT OF YOUR LIFE. EVERYONE IN YOUR HOME NEEDS TO THINK ABOUT WHAT ADOPTION WILL MEAN TO THEM AND WHAT ADJUSTMENTS THEY MAY HAVE TO MAKE.

4. Wait for a match.

How soon a match is made will largely depend on how flexible you are in terms of the age, gender, and special needs of the child you will accept. Once a worker decides you are a good match for a child, you'll get to read the child's file and speak to people who work and live with the child.

5. Get to know the child.

If you feel the match is appropriate, the worker will give the child your adoptive parent profile and arrange for visits to begin. This is a good time to start discussing the adoption assistance that might be available.

6. Prepare to adopt.

Before the child moves into your home, the worker will ask you to sign a *Statement of Intent to Adopt*.

You'll also meet with the child's team to develop a plan to transition the child into your home. *Vermont law requires that the child live with you for at least 6 months before the adoption can become legal.*

This is a good time to begin exploring options for post-adoption contact between the child and birth family members (e.g., letters, phone calls, and visits). The worker can help.

7. Legally finalize the adoption.

Finalization is the last step in the adoption process. Your worker will help you pull together the required paperwork, file it in court on your behalf, and schedule the finalization hearing. As soon as the judge signs the adoption order, you will have permanent legal custody of your child.

The Support Available

Adoption Services

There is no fee to adopt a child in Vermont foster care. What's more, Project Family will provide adoption services at no cost to you (e.g., pre-adoption counseling, finalization services, and post-placement visits).

Financial Support

- Most of the waiting children are eligible for an adoption subsidy — a monthly payment to help you meet the child's special needs — until age 18. The child's age and special needs as well as your family's financial situation will be considered when determining any amount you might receive.

You must apply for, negotiate, and sign an adoption assistance agreement before the adoption is completed and, in some cases, before the child moves into your home.

- You may be eligible to claim a federal tax credit when you adopt a child with special needs.

Child Care

Subsidized child care may be available if you:

- Live in Vermont; and
- Have an accepted need for care (e.g., you work or attend school) or it's authorized based on the child's special needs.

Medical Benefits

Most of the waiting children qualify for medical benefits through Medicaid, which helps cover the cost of doctor's visits, prescriptions, hospital care, and more. If you live or move out of state, medical benefits may be provided by the other state.

Ongoing Support

Adoptive families in Vermont are fortunate to have quality post-adoption resources available to them.

➤ Vermont Adoption Consortium

<http://www.vtadoption.org/>

A consortium of agencies and groups around the state that offer support to guardians and adoptive parents. Supports include trauma and adoption informed parenting education, information and referral, assistance with school and community issues, and support and discussion groups.

➤ Vermont Foster and Adoptive Family Association (VFAFA)

<http://www.vfafa.org/>

A statewide network of foster and adoptive parents. Membership benefits include a newsletter, annual conference, and training & networking opportunities.

➤ Vermont Resource Families Listserv

<http://www.vfafa.org/links/vrfl.htm>

Maintained by VFAFA, this Listserv is a place where foster parents, adoptive parents, kinship caregivers, respite providers, and others can share ideas, information, and resources.

➤ Voices at the Table Blog & Website

<http://voicesatthetable.wordpress.com/>

A bi-weekly blog for Vermont kinship, foster, kinship foster, and adoptive families. The website includes information about resources, support, and educational opportunities.

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ADOPTIVE FAMILIES ARE THOSE WHO SEEK SUPPORT FROM THE BEGINNING.

Project Family

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and Lund (Vermont's largest non-profit adoption agency).*

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dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/kids